

George Washington to Thomas Gage, August 20, 1775, Draft, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799. John C. Fitzpatrick, Editor.

To LIEUTENANT GENERAL THOMAS GAGE

Head Quarters, Cambridge, August 20, 1775.

Sir: I addressed you on the 11th. Instant in Terms, which gave the fairest Scope for the Exercise of that Humanity, and Politeness, which were supposed to form a Part of your Character. I remonstrated with you on the unworthy Treatment, shewn to the officers and Citizens of America, whom the Fortune of War, Chance, or a mistaken Confidence, had thrown into your Hands.

Whether British or American Mercy, Fortitude, and Patience are most preeminent, whether our virtuous Citizens, whom the Hand of Tyranny has forced into Arms to defend their Wives, their Children, and their Property, or the mercenary Instruments of lawless Domination, avarice and Revenge, best deserve the Appellation of Rebels, and the Punishment of that Cord, which your affected Clemency has forborne to inflict: whether the Authority, under which Fact, is usurped, or founded upon the genuine Principles of Liberty, were altogether foreign to the Subject. I purposely avoided all political Disquisition; nor shall I now avail myself of those Advantages, which the sacred Cause of my Country of Liberty, and human Nature, give me over you: Much less shall I stoop to Retort and Invective. But the Intelligence you say you have received from our Army requires a Reply. I have taken Time, Sir, to make strict Inquiry, and find it has not the least Foundation in Truth. Not only your Officers and Soldiers have been treated with a Tenderness, due to Fellow-Citizens, and Brethren, but even those execrable Parricides, whose Counsels and

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Aid have deluged their Country with Blood, have been protected from the Fury of a justly-enraged People. Far from compelling or permitting their Assistance, I am embarrassed with the Numbers, who crowd to our Camp, animated with the purest Principles of Virtue, and Love of their Country. You advise me to give free operation to Truth, to punish misrepresentation and Falsehood. If Experience stamps Value upon Counsel, yours must have a Weight, which few can claim. You best can tell, how far the Convulsion, which has brought Such Ruin on both Countries and shaken the mighty Empire of Britain to its Foundation, may be traced to these malignant Causes.

You affect, Sir, to despise all Rank, not derived from the same Source with your own, I cannot conceive one more honourable, than that, which flows from the uncorrupted Choice of a brave and free People, the purest Source, and original Fountain of all Power. Far from making it a Plea for Cruelty, a mind of true Magnanimity, and enlarged Ideas would comprehend, and respect it.

What may have been the ministerial Views. which have precipitated the present Crisis, Lexington, Concord, and Charles Town can best declare. May that God, to whom you then appealed, judge between America, and you. Under his Providence, those who influence the Councils of America, and all the other Inhabitants of the united Colonies at the Hazard of their Lives are determined to hand down to Posterity those just and invaluable Privileges, which they received from their Ancestors.

I shall now, Sir, close my Correspondence with you, perhaps forever. If your Officers, our Prisoners, receive a Treatment from me, different from what I wish to shew them, they and you will remember the Occasion of it. I am, sir, etc.¹

The draft, in the Washington Papers, is in the writing of Joseph Reed; the copy sent by Washington to Congress is in that of Edmund Randolph and is dated August 19. The letter sent is in the archives of the New York Historical Society and is dated the 20th. Washington's first letter to Gage (August 11) and Gage's answer were published by the British Government in the London Gazette about six weeks later, but the August 20 letter was ignored.